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SUBJECT: THE FRENCH ELECT SARKOZY -- WHAT THEIR CHOICE MEANS

REF: A. (A) PARIS 1791 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. (B) EMBASSY PARIS DAILY SIPRNET REPORT FOR MAY 4

[1](#)C. 2007 AND PREVIOUS

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[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: In electing Nicolas Sarkozy as France's
sixth President under the Fifth Republic (ref), French voters:

-- entrusted their country's highest office to an intensely
ambitious and passionately action-oriented politician;

-- endorsed the wide-ranging program of reforms -- including
market-oriented social and economic reforms -- that Sarkozy
ran on;

-- implicitly gave him the green light to try and implement
these reforms quickly (to be confirmed in the upcoming June 7
parliamentary elections);

-- endorsed a way forward for overcoming France's 2005
rejection of the EU constitutional treaty; and

-- signaled, by embracing a figure long tagged as
"pro-American," their desire to renew trust in the
U.S.-France relationship.

Septel will report on the foreign policy implications of
Sarkozy's election. END SUMMARY.

A LIFELONG AMBITION

[1](#)2. (U) Sarkozy has never hidden his ambition to be president
of France. Biographers speculate that his decision to
dedicate himself completely to politics -- and to occupying
France's highest political office -- dates from his student
days. As a law student, Sarkozy took his first steps as a
political activist, and wrote a graduate thesis on Georges
Mandel, a key political figure in France during the first
half of the 20th century. (Note: Mandel began his career as
an aide to the WWI-era Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and
ended it assassinated by French, pro-Nazi militia during
WWII. End Note.)

"A PASSION FOR ACTION"

[1](#)3. (U) Sarkozy himself has said, "You will never understand

me, without also understanding Georges Mandel." In his biography of Mandel, "The Monk of Politics", published in 1994, Sarkozy draws, in effect, a portrait of himself at his best as he sketches that of his subject: "...life entirely dedicated to France and to politics," consumed by a will to act, "act to live, act without measure." This "passion for action," as Sarkozy has also referred to it, is one of the traits that 53 percent of French voters, fed up with the immobilism of France's politics-as-usual have positively endorsed in voting him into office.

A SELF-MADE PRESIDENT

¶4. (U) Sarkozy often evokes how "he climbed the ladder starting at the bottom," and had to "fight every step of the way." Sarkozy's educational background is not that of France's political elite; in particular, he is not a graduate of the National School of Administration (ENA). Even though Sarkozy has been the protégé of powerful political figures throughout his career -- former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, former prime minister Edouard Balladur, and President Chirac -- he has still always felt himself an "outsider," battling, and eventually dominating, more privileged "insiders."

WHO STANDS FOR INDIVIDUALISM AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

¶5. (U) This self-made-man dimension of Sarkozy comes across clearly in his sympathy for France's entrepreneurs and private-sector employees -- those "who get up early and go to work," and have to make their own way in the vicissitudes of competitive markets without any protecting, privileged status. Much of Sarkozy's "liberal" -- that is, market-oriented -- economic reform agenda stems from his desire to both level and widen the playing field for France's entrepreneurs and private-sector achievers.

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A COMPLEX REFORM PROGRAM

¶6. (U) During the year that preceded his nomination as the candidate of the center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party, Sarkozy led a wide-ranging examination of the problems facing France, in preparation for forging his presidential platform. This effort -- which included consultations with subject-matter experts, review by political allies, and testing of proposals with focus groups -- was run by former education minister Francois Fillon, now tipped as the leading candidate for prime minister. The resulting reform program -- which was adjusted, sharpened and condensed throughout the presidential campaign -- is quite far-reaching and complex. It is much more than an economic liberalization program.

¶7. (U) For example, one facet, which proposes reforms to political institutions and the administration of justice, includes proposals for reforming education and immigration, and for social programs to help immigrant youth in France's troubled neighborhoods. The two other main facets of the reform platform deal with European and international affairs and with social and economic matters. The latter includes controversial proposals partly to deregulate France's labor markets, reform retirement systems and cut taxes. A compendium of Sarkozy's propositions made during the campaign on all reform subjects, which gives a sense of the range and specificity of his reform proposals, can be found at http://www.u-m-p.org/propositions/proposition_s.php.

MOVING FIRST ON THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FRONT

¶8. (U) Throughout the campaign Sarkozy has hammered at the theme that he is a different sort of politician because he "says what's he's going to do, and then does it." Forming a new government and winning a majority in the upcoming legislative elections June 10 and 17 will come first, but

thereafter, Sarkozy has made clear that he intends to deliver, and quickly, across a range of reform proposals, in particular those aspects of his economic and social agenda that immediately affect the lives -- and pocketbooks -- of everyday voters.

A BUSY PRESIDENT

¶9. (U) Specifically, Sarkozy has promised to call an extraordinary session of parliament to enact his proposals to exempt overtime hours from social security and other taxes, make mortgage payments on primary residences tax deductible, and abolish inheritance taxes for all but the top five percent of households. In addition, Sarkozy has said that he will, over the summer, conduct a dialog with labor union federations and other organizations that represent "social partners," with a view to agreeing to labor market reforms, social security and pension reforms, reform of higher education, and the establishment of minimum service requirements for mass transport in the event of strikes by rail and bus workers.

AND A BUSY OPPOSITION?

¶10. (U) Sarkozy's clear-cut victory, with 53 percent of the vote, gives him a mandate for change. In the recent past, France's labor unions, its public sector workers and university students have, largely successfully, resisted change of the sort Sarkozy believes he has been elected to bring about. Sarkozy is convinced that if he moves quickly, his mandate will nonetheless carry the day, producing the kind of positive results that will modernize France and allow him to win a second term. The possibility that a "social movement" intent on blocking Sarkozy's liberal reforms might slowly gather strength and seriously complicate his bid to reform France is a very real one, however.

RETURNING TO THE EUROPEAN FOLD

¶11. (U) Sarkozy's victory also offers the possibility that "France is back" in Europe following its 2005 rejection of the EU constitutional treaty (septel will report on the foreign policy implications of Sarkozy's victory). In electing Sarkozy, voters endorsed his practical plan for a simplified treaty that can be ratified through parliamentary

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means, thereby avoiding another divisive referendum. Sarkozy's announced plans to travel to Berlin and Brussels first make it clear that he intends for France to regain its status as one of the EU's key players.

U.S.-FRANCE -- REAL FRIENDS WHO CAN REALLY DISAGREE

¶12. (U) U.S.-France relations have improved markedly during the past two years following their low-point at the time of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Though President Chirac has contributed to this improvement in relations, he nonetheless remains closely identified with knee-jerk opposition to the U.S. by France. "Sarkozy the American" is a well-known epithet long applied to France's new president, which the Socialist opposition attempted to exploit in labeling Sarkozy as "Bush's poodle." Like much else in the Socialist campaign, denigrating Sarkozy for being pro-American also didn't "take" with French voters. The U.S. was the only other country Sarkozy mentioned by name in his victory statement May 9, and Sarkozy made clear, as he has throughout the campaign, that he would like to renew trust between the U.S. and France -- while underlining that true friends can be expected to truly disagree.

ADAPTING THE AMERICAN DREAM

¶13. (U) During the campaign Sarkozy often ended his stump speeches -- evoking Martin Luther King -- by calling for a "French dream" of social equality, social mobility, and equal

opportunity. In voting Sarkozy into office, French voters seem to have endorsed this vision. In Sarkozy's case, it should never be forgotten that, more than a dream, his vision is also a concrete plan of action. He has said what he plans to do. He will be judged on whether he does it. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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